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# THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

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## JESUS OF NAZARETH

### HOW HE THOUGHT, LIVED, WORKED, AND ACHIEVED

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By ERNEST D. BURTON

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#### FOREWORD TO THE STUDENT

Only by regular and systematic work can you achieve results in the study of the Bible. Therefore work regularly and have a definite daily time for your work if possible.

Read intelligently, making sure that you understand what you are reading. Do not, if you can avoid it, pass over a word without knowing what it means.<sup>1</sup>

Have a notebook always at hand as you study and use it to clarify your own thought, to summarize in your own words a passage or teaching, or to note down something which particularly impresses you.

Frequently turn back and recall what you have read so that if possible when you have finished the course you will have a clear conception of what the life-purpose of Jesus was and how he achieved it; for from your sympathy with and appreciation of those two things will come much of the inspiration which will enable you also, whatever your years or environment, to develop a great life-purpose and to achieve it.

Some who study this course will wish to make it more thorough than others. For their benefit a series of suggestions for further thought is given in connection with each division of the subject. Sometimes this additional work will call for extra reading. At other times it will simply require more time and more careful consideration. The course will be considered complete in the case of all who do the regular work, exclusive of these additional suggestions.

There are various good ways of studying the gospels. We may take one of them, the Gospel of Matthew, for example, and follow it through in order, considering not only the picture of Jesus which it gives to us but the special message which the writer wished to convey to the people of his own day. Or we may put the four side by side, and endeavor to reproduce from them all as full and accurate a story of Jesus' life as possible. Or we may select the passages which contain

<sup>1</sup> A good one-volume dictionary of the Bible is that edited by James Hastings and published by Charles Scribner's Sons, \$6.00. A small pamphlet dictionary containing most of the words to which reference will be made in this course is published by the Institute and may be secured for 50 cents. Other books may occasionally be referred to in this course, but the one indispensable book for study is the Bible, preferably a copy of the American Standard Revised Edition, published by Thos. Nelson's Sons. A valuable aid is a Harmony of the Gospels, if possible either Stevens and Burton's, or Burton and Goodspeed's.

Jesus' teaching, and try from them to reconstruct the message of Jesus to his own day and to the world.

In the present study, instead of any of these things, we shall select passages from the first three gospels, which will enable us as through a window to see into the mind and experience of Jesus, and which will show us as in a succession of pictures Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, living his life among men and with God, teaching, preaching, healing, steadfastly pursuing the purpose of his life among friends and foes, in favor and disfavor, giving his life "a ransom for many." After all the centuries the life and teaching of Jesus have a value for us and an influence in the world beyond those of any other life that has ever been lived in this world. Never was it more needful that we understand and heed their message to us and to our day.

#### 1. HOW THE STORY OF THE LIFE OF JESUS WAS PRESERVED. LUKE 1:1-4

Very few books of the Bible have a formal preface such as is common in modern books. The letters of the apostle Paul all begin in about the same fashion with a salutation usually followed by a paragraph of thanksgiving. The Book of Revelation has a formal prologue, and the first paragraph of the Gospel of John is usually called the prologue. But the only New Testament book that has a real preface is the Gospel of Luke. It fills the first four verses of the Gospel.

This preface is of great value and interest because it tells more than we learn anywhere else in the New Testament about the way in which our gospels came to be written. Read it through carefully, and from it, if you can, answer these questions: (1) Was this gospel the first written story of Jesus' life, or did the writer of this book know of other similar books written before his? (2) How many such books did he know of? (3) Are the names of any of these earlier books given by him? May any other of our gospels have been among them? (4) From what source did the writers of whom this preface speaks learn the facts which they put into their narratives? See vs. 2. (5) From what source does the writer of this preface imply that he obtained the material for his book? Was he himself an "eye witness" of the events? Were the authors of the other books "eye witnesses"? (6) Who were the "eye witnesses and ministers of the word" to whom he refers? (7) What means did the writer of this book employ to make sure of his facts? (8) Who was Theophilus? Was the book probably written for him only, or for him and others like him? His name, a not uncommon one, means "beloved of God," as our modern name Theodore means "gift of God." Was he a Christian? (9) Through whose eyes shall we, as we read this book, be seeing the events of Jesus' life, and through whose ears hearing his teaching?

The study of this preface and the comparison of this gospel with the other gospels has led scholars generally to believe that among the earlier books to which Luke refers in his preface was the Gospel of Mark, that Luke made use of other early gospels beside Mark, but that we no longer possess any of these in separate form. They also conclude that Matthew was written about the same time as Luke—probably between 70 and 100 A.D., and that the writer of Matthew made use of earlier books, and indeed in considerable part of the same books that Luke used. He certainly had Mark. The Gospel of John was the last of our gospels to be written, and made comparatively little use of the older gospels. In this study we are to use only Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

*Suggestions for further study:* 1. Turn over the pages of the New Testament, and notice how each book begins. Which other book reminds you, by its way of beginning, of Luke's preface? Why is this? (2) If you have a Harmony of the Gospels at hand, that of Stevens and Burton, or of Burton and Goodspeed, turn over the pages slowly and notice in how many cases there are two, three, or even four accounts of an event, or reports of a discourse, and how closely these parallel accounts sometimes resemble one another. This will suggest the extent to which and the way in which the later books used the earlier ones. (3) In the latter part of the second century a Christian named Tatian made a single gospel out of our four, just as before him Luke and Matthew had each made a single gospel out of Mark and others. This gospel of Tatian was long used in some of the churches instead of our four. Should we be better off today or worse if that gospel had finally displaced our four? (4) Is it an advantage to us or a disadvantage that we have our present Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, instead of the older and probably shorter gospels to which Luke refers in his preface? In what respects?

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2. THE YOUTH OF JESUS IN NAZARETH. LUKE 2:1-7, 39-52; MARK 6:1-4

The apocryphal gospels, that grew up after our gospels were written, and in which men gave free rein to their imaginations, have long and marvelous stories of Jesus' early life. The record of our gospels is very brief.

Read Luke 2:1-7, and 39, and notice: (1) The name of Jesus' parents (to use the language of Luke 2:43). (2) The family to which his father belonged. (3) The place of Jesus' birth. (4) The place in which they lived before his birth and afterward. (5) With a map before you, notice the location of these two places, the direction and distance of each from Jerusalem.

Read Mark 6:1-4, and consider: (1) What place is here called "his own country" or city? See Luke 4:16. (2) How many brothers and sisters did Jesus have, and what were their names? (3) Were these brothers and sisters older or younger than he? See Luke 2:7. (4) Was it a home of wealth, or of poverty, or of neither wealth nor poverty? On what do you base your opinion? (5) What would be the natural place and experience of Jesus as the big brother in such a home? His relations to his father, to his mother, to his brothers, to his sisters? The influence of these things upon his character?

Read Luke 2:40-52. Consider: (1) In the thought of the writer of this story what is the central point of interest? (2) Vs. 49 should doubtless read as in the Revised Version: "Wist (knew) ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" The question implies that to him the most natural place to go, where therefore his parents might have expected to find him, was the Temple. Jerusalem was a walled city with narrow streets, and no parks, and the only large open place in the city was the great open square of the Temple, at one side of which stood the buildings of the sanctuary proper. Why did Jesus, finding himself alone in the city, make his way to the Temple? Where would you, if, when you were twelve years old, you had been lost in a great city, have felt safest, in a crowded hotel, in a market place, or in a church, if there had been one open, with people coming and going? (3) What feeling about the place is shown in the fact that he calls it, not the Temple, but "my Father's house"? (4) What feeling about God is shown in his speaking of him as "my Father"? See Ps. 89:26; Jer. 3:4; Matt. 6:4.

(5) How early in life is it normal and natural for a boy to think of God in this way, and to feel as Jesus did about the place that is most suggestive of the presence of God?

Read again Luke 2:40, 52; Mark 6:4. Consider: (1) What kind of life do these passages represent Jesus as living in Nazareth before he became a public teacher? (2) What do they say of his physical development? (3) What of his intellectual life? (4) What of his religious life? Was it perfect and complete from the beginning or was it a growth? (5) How did his neighbors feel about him? (6) Was he in these days a person of leisure, a student preparing to be a rabbi or scribe, or a working man—a laborer with his hands? (7) If you had known him in those days how would you have felt about him?

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*Suggestions for further study:* 1. From what you know or can learn by reading about the customs of that day and land, what books do you suppose were accessible to Jesus?<sup>1</sup> 2. What use did he probably make of them? With what books do the gospels indicate that he was acquainted? 3. Was the manual laborer looked down upon or respected among the Jews? What social standing would a carpenter have in Nazareth? 4. Did Jesus probably go to school? If so, to what kind of a school and where? 5. Was Joseph still living when Jesus left home and became a public teacher? If you think not, what are your reasons? Was Jesus perhaps responsible for the support of the family during a part of his young manhood? 6. Who would take that responsibility when he left home? 7. Where was Nazareth situated? How much of Palestine could Jesus see from the city or the nearby hills? What great events of Jewish history had taken place within sight of those hills? 8. At what time of the year did the Passover take place? 9. How long a journey was it from Nazareth to Jerusalem? How much of Jewish history had taken place along the line of that journey? 10. What place in the life of Jesus as a young man in Nazareth do you judge from the whole record was filled by people? by books? by history? by nature? by money-earning occupations?

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### 3. THE PROPHET OF THE WRATH TO COME. MARK 1:1-8; LUKE 3:1-20

While Jesus was still working at his trade in Nazareth there appeared in Judea a prophet, such as had not been seen among the Jews for many years. Though he is said to have been a cousin of Jesus, it is not certain that they had any personal acquaintance with one another. But evidently the reports of his preaching were spread throughout the country, for people were always passing up and down the roads from Judea to Galilee, and telling the news as they went. What kind of a report came to Nazareth and to the ears of Jesus we may gather from the record that has found its way into our gospels. Two accounts have been preserved, one in Mark and one in another gospel which both Matthew and Luke have used along with Mark. Read Mark 1:1-6, carefully noticing: (1) Where John preached. Why did he not go to the synagogues or the temple or the market places? (2) His clothing and food. What ancient prophet does this recall? See II Kings 1:8. What does it suggest as to his dependence on city markets, and his general mode of life? (3) The size and make-up of his audiences. (4) The subject and character of his preaching. (5) The purpose and meaning of his baptism.

Read Luke 3:7-14. This passage is a brief but striking summary of the message of John to his generation; undoubtedly the product of months, if not years, of

<sup>1</sup> See Mathews, *History of New Testament Times*, chaps. i, ii, and viii.

reflection in the wilderness (see Luke 1:80) and based on a keen insight into the characteristics of the current religion of his people, it made a profound impression. Read it carefully and notice: (1) What he thought of the people of his day. (2) What he believed was soon to happen to that generation. (3) On whom he believed the coming wrath of God would fall, the Gentiles that knew not God, or the people of Israel that worshiped God with sacrifice and temple worship. (4) How severe he thought that judgment would be, whether corrective or destructive. (5) Whether he believed that descent from Abraham and membership in the "chosen people" would save men from this fiery judgment of God. (6) Whether there was any way of escaping it, and if so, what that way was. (7) What John meant by "repentance." (8) What he regarded as "fruits worthy of repentance," that is, the action which following repentance would prove its reality. See vs. 8 and compare vss. 10-14. (9) What would correspond today to the answer which John gave to the several classes of people in vss. 10-14?

Is this message of John properly called a gospel—good news? If so, in what sense? Are there modern preachers whom you know, or know about, whose message is like that of John?

Read Luke 3:15-20. In this passage John speaks of the One greater than himself whom he looked for to follow him. Consider: (1) The contrast that he draws between himself and this greater successor. Which of the two announces an opportunity to escape from wrath by repentance? Which is to inflict judgment on those who do not repent? (2) Is the judgment of his successor mild and corrective or destructive and irremedial? (3) On whom was the judgment to fall? (4) If John thought of his successor as the Messiah, was he the kind of messiah that his nation generally was looking for? Read Ps. 2; John 6:14, 15, Mark 10:35-40. (5) What characteristic of John led to his imprisonment and death?

Form as definite an impression as you can of John and an estimate of his ability, character and effectiveness, and then turn to Luke 7:24-35 and read what Jesus said of him when he was in prison. How does your judgment correspond with that of Jesus?

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*Suggestions for further study:* 1. Why was John thought of in connection with Elijah? See Luke 1:17; Mark 9:11-13; John 1:21. 2. Luke 3:15 suggests that people in John's day were thinking about and expecting the Messiah; what did they expect the Messiah to do?<sup>1</sup> 3. John gathered disciples, as Jesus after him did. See Mark 2:18. What became of these disciples and of the movement that he started? Did it cease entirely with his death or become merged in Jesus' movement, or was there a Johannic church alongside of the Christian church? See Acts 19:1-4.

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#### 4. THE RESPONSE OF JESUS TO THE PREACHING OF JOHN. MARK 1:9-11.

The report of John's preaching was probably spread not only through Judea but into Galilee and Perea. When Jesus heard of it, it must have raised serious questions in his mind. Did his estimate of the people agree with that of John? Did he also look for swift and irrevocable judgment upon Israel? Was his idea of the Messiah the same as John's? But even if he was not wholly in agreement

<sup>1</sup> See Mathews, *History of New Testament Times*, chap. xiii, and "Messiah," in *Dictionary of the Bible*.

with John's message, was John in the main right, and if so could Jesus refuse to respond to his appeal, and to throw the weight of his influence on the side of the movement in the direction of repentance which John had started and was fostering? The gospels say nothing about any debate that Jesus may have had with himself over these questions, but they tell us what he did.

Read Mark 1:9-11. Consider: (1) Whether the gospels mention John as preaching in Galilee where Jesus was, or as baptizing at the Sea of Galilee. (2) Whether they speak of the Galileans generally as going to John's baptism. (3) Whether Jesus' response to John's message was in a measure exceptional among the Galileans. (4) Who is recorded as seeing the heavens opened? (5) To whom is the voice from heaven addressed? (6) What spiritual fact does the descent of the Spirit upon him as a dove represent? (7) What did it mean to Jesus to be assured that he was the beloved Son of God? (8) If, as seems to be the case, he came to John's baptism and associated himself with John's movement not because John had sent any special message to him or because he was himself conscious of personal share in the sin of the nation, but because he felt that he ought to respond to the call of the prophet to the nation, what was the result and reward in his case of his assuming a share in the common duty of the nation? (9) In Matthew's account of the baptism, it is recorded that in reply to a suggestion of reluctance on the part of John to baptize him, Jesus said, "Thus it becomes us always to do what is right." Does this language imply a sense of obligation on his part to undertake the common duties of men? (10) Would the new sense of sonship to God and of his love carry with it a new sense of responsibility? Is it possible that it was his response to John's call to the nation that led through his spiritual experience in the baptism to his undertaking his own prophetic work for the Jewish nation? (11) Does the response to the call of common duty often lead to the discovery of a special duty or responsibility? (12) Do you see any connection between the incident in the Temple when Jesus was twelve years old (note especially Luke 2:49) and the baptism, with the sense which it brought that God looked upon him as his son and loved him as such?

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*Suggestions for further study:* 1. This oldest story of the baptism does not suggest that any one saw the heavenly vision or heard the voice from heaven but Jesus. Both Matthew and Luke by very slight but different modifications of the narrative suggest, without directly saying it, that there were spectators or auditors. Is it natural that the incident should in course of time have come to be thought of this way? How ought we to think of it? 2. The phrase "Son of God" is used in several different senses in the Bible. In its primary and fundamental sense it has nothing to do with origin or nature, but expresses a moral relation to God, meaning (see II Sam. 7:14; Rom. 8:14; Matt. 5:45) one who is obedient to God, like him morally, and for this reason the object of his approving love. Notice also the word "beloved" in the story of the baptism, and in the transfiguration. Out of this fundamental sense and the association with it of the thought that a son represents his father, grew in course of time the use of the term "Son of God" in reference to the Messiah. Such passages as II Sam. 7:14 and Ps. 2:7 furnish a natural basis for the development of such a thought. But there is little trace of it in the New Testament. Perhaps Rom. 1:4 represents the nearest approach to it, and here it clearly refers to the ascended Christ. In only one passage of the New Testament is there any suggestion of a meaning, approximating that of son by generation (Luke 1:35), and not even here is it certain that this is the thought. In what sense do you think the phrase is to be understood in the words that came to Jesus out of the heavens?

## 5. THE DEFINITION OF IDEALS. MATT. 4:1-II.

The rich, spiritual experience of which the baptism of Jesus was both the expression and the occasion naturally called for a period of retirement and thought. Filled with a new sense of power and responsibility and a new consciousness of God's love, Jesus went away into the wilderness to think out clearly what was his duty, and how he was to do it. The Spirit, Matthew says, led him into the wilderness. But such an experience could not fail to be one of testing, and in that sense of temptation; only the greatest work, the highest principles, must be chosen. But these could be chosen only by comparing them with others. Choice means selection; selection means rejection as well as acceptance.

It is not worth while to spend much time over the question how much of this narrative is clothed in figurative or symbolic language; in what garb the devil came to Jesus, whether he went to the pinnacle of the temple and the top of the mountain physically or only mentally. The spiritual elements of the experience are the only vital and important ones. Read Matt. 4:2-4. Consider: (1) The general sphere of the temptation. Is it in the realm of the physical or the political or the religious life of men? Has it to do, generally speaking, with the part that material things were to play in life? (2) The relation of the sense of divine sonship to the temptation. Are men ever tempted to make the fact that they are children of God, objects of his love, an excuse for grasping after the physical goods of life? Do they in effect say, "Does not the *earth* belong to the Saints of God?" (3) Jesus evidently decided that he ought not to devote himself to the acquisition of physical good; that that was not what sonship to God meant for him. Was this because he regarded physical things as evil or needless? (See Matt. 6:32.) Was it because he believed that though physical good was real good it was not the highest good and ought to be treated only as one of the goods of life and not the highest? (See Luke 12:16-21.) Was it because he conceived that while other men might be farmers or merchants or carpenters, as he had been, he must henceforth devote himself to the spiritual tasks of life; not serve men through the physical things, but directly? Before answering these questions finally, examine the passage which he quotes from Deut. 8:3, reading from the beginning of the chapter, and notice also how Jesus uses it. Might some men have answered the temptation in the second sense, and legitimately and conscientiously become farmers, or merchants, or builders? If so, in what spirit and with what purpose would they thereafter do their work? But are there also other men who are just as clearly called upon to devote themselves to the immaterial things of life, to moral leadership, to the spiritual guidance and inspiration of other men, who are divinely appointed to be prophets, sages, if need be, martyrs? If so, what would you say of the refusal of such a man to accept this task, and his choice of the kind of work that for another man would be his highest duty? Can you state the general principle that seems to have actuated Jesus, whether his answer is interpreted in either the second or the third way?

Read Matt. 4:5-7. Consider (1) the general sphere of this temptation. Notice that this also starts with the consciousness of sonship to God ("If thou art Son of God"), and that it proposes a bold stroke on the assumption that God would see to it that it came out all right. Is this appeal in the sphere of man's physical needs, or of his ambition for power, or of his faith in God—his religion?



(2) The purpose of the proposed act—casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Are religious men, just because they are religious, tempted to think that they are outside of law, can take risks, moral or other, that other men cannot take? Does piety excuse us from praying, “Lead us not into temptation?” A man once said, “I am sure this business cannot fail because I have promised God to give him twenty per cent of the profits.” How would Jesus have answered him? Would he have justified his neglecting ordinary business principles and precautions? (3) How would Jesus have answered the question, What does true faith in God justify us in expecting from God, and call upon us to do in reference to the risks and danger of life?

Read Matt. 4:8-10. Consider: (1) The sphere of this temptation. Would the fact that Jesus felt himself to be the object of God’s love, and endowed with power from on high, imply that he had ambition? What would be the scope of that ambition? How far had the Jews believed that the Messiah would extend his political power? See Ps. 2:6-12; Luke 2:51, 52; Matt. 20:20, 21. Would the prevalence of such ideas suggest to Jesus the possibility of achieving his ends by political or military methods? (2) What did Jesus consider to be wrong in the proposal that came to his mind—the end to be achieved or the means by which it was suggested that he should achieve it? Notice his answer, in vs. 10. (3) What did Jesus have in mind as a worshiping of Satan: a literal bowing down before an altar or image of Satan, a prayer addressed expressly to Satan, or the adoption of methods for achieving his ends which would have been in effect a giving up of his allegiance to his Heavenly Father? Is this a common temptation of ambitious men? (4) What would Jesus’ answer to this temptation mean in terms of the way in which he determined to do that great work to which he felt himself called?

Can you combine the answer to the three temptations into a statement of the decisions which Jesus reached in these forty days of meditation in the wilderness as to the things that he would work for, his attitude toward God, the methods he would use?

Can you frame a picture of Jesus as he stood at the beginning of his work as a teacher and leader of men? How old was he? What kind of a life had he lived up to this time? What was his appearance? What were his ideals, his ambitions, his principles of action?

*(This study will be completed in the November number of the BIBLICAL WORLD)*